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SUBJECT: BARBADOS NATIONAL DAY: AN ELECTION PULPIT

Summary

¶1. (U) Barbados celebrated its 41st year of independence from Great Britain on November 30. Both the current ruling Barbados Labour Party (BLP) and the opposition Democratic Labour Party (DLP) took advantage of the occasion to posture themselves favorably for the upcoming national election, predicted by many to take place in early 2008. End Summary.

Ruling BLP: "A Nation of Achievements"

¶2. (U) Wedged between paid advertisements congratulating the government of Barbados on its Independence Day, Prime Minister Owen Arthur conveyed in his national message that nation building since 1966 has brought out the very best of Barbadians, particularly in 2007. PM Arthur articulated three main themes of his party's tenure: Barbados cares, Barbados works, and Barbados matters. Arthur's message was substantive and lengthy, consisting of specific achievements as a result of his leadership. Among them, economic growth and development, lower taxes, progress on the Caribbean Single Market Economy (CSME), and an outward eye toward globalization.

¶3. (U) Arthur also claimed that Barbados "will be especially remembered for the manner in which our nation responded to the challenge of having to take the spotlight on the global stage," referring to Barbados "having to shoulder" the Cricket World Cup and the World Cup of Golf. Arthur also credited Foreign Minister Billie Miller for "conceptualizing the June Conference on the Caribbean in Washington." Arthur praised the Miller's leadership in the conference and his government's success in "redefining its relationship with the United States."

Opposition DLP: "A Nation Yearning for Change"

¶4. (U) In his national independence day message, opposition leader David Thompson praised all Barbadians for the successes achieved in the country over the years, in particular the 30th place ranking in the UNDP Human Development Index, but was careful not to assign credit to the BLP; instead declaring that "no one institution or person can claim credit for this achievement." In an attempt to discredit the BLP further, Thompson alleged that there is a major disconnect from the people, complacency and unresponsiveness, corrupted leadership, and danger to the constitution (likely related to Arthur's attempt to secure tenured civil service jobs for political appointees, (septel)).

¶5. (U) Thompson reiterated his principal campaign message that all the signs of fatigue and desire for change in leadership are present, and pointed to three issues that are undermining democratic development: cost of land and housing, cost of raising children, and the general cost of living. The light at the end of the tunnel, according to Thompson, is that the DLP will come to the rescue, as it has before, with a new team, new energy and new ideas.

Comment

¶6. (U) PM Arthur's Independence Day address took the higher road of political posturing, addressing opposition party campaign issues without addressing the opposition party. The message was lengthy, substantive and positive, while at the same time addressing current challenges. Thompson, on the other hand, chose instead to point out the shortcomings of his opponent, a strategy he has employed with increased rigor over the last month. As a result, his message was short on substance and gave the reader no indication of his party's achievements. Common sense dictates that Arthur's achievements would be very well supported and justify another win. But as a good contact in the Barbados government told EconOff, Barbadians have a tradition of voting someone out of office, rather than into office. If this is the case, and people do in fact have Arthur fatigue, Thompson may see himself riding the wave of the larger Caribbean opposition party upsets, i.e. St. Lucia, Jamaica, and the Bahamas. End Comment.

HOWARD